

# SELF CARE

## Influenza: Questions and Answers

### **What Is Influenza (the flu)?**

Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). The flu usually spreads from person to person when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks and the virus is sent into the air. Unlike many other viral respiratory infections, such as the common cold, the flu causes severe illness and life-threatening complications in many people.

### **How can a person tell if they have the flu?**

It is very difficult to distinguish the flu from other viral or bacterial causes of respiratory illnesses on the basis of symptoms alone. A test can confirm that an illness is influenza if the patient is tested within the first 2-3 days after symptoms begin. In addition, a doctor's exam may be needed to determine whether a person has another infection that is a complication of influenza.

### **How soon will I get sick if I am exposed to the flu?**

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus to when symptoms begin is about 1-4 days, with an average of about 2 days.

### **How Long Is a Person with Flu Virus Contagious?**

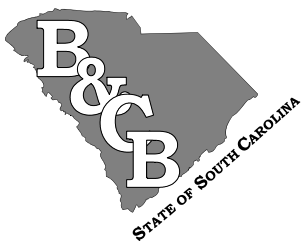
The period when an infected person is contagious depends on the age of the person. Adults may be contagious from 1 day prior to becoming sick and for 3-7 days after they first develop symptoms. Some children may be contagious for longer than a week.

### **Can antibiotics drugs cure the flu?**

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. The best way to prevent the flu is to get an influenza vaccine (flu shot) each fall, before flu season.

### **The Myth of the "Stomach Flu"**

Many people use the term "stomach flu" to describe illnesses with nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea that are not caused by the flu virus, but can be caused by many different viruses, bacteria, or even parasites. However, while vomiting, diarrhea and being "sick to your stomach" can sometimes be related to the flu — particularly in children — these problems are rarely the main symptoms of influenza. The flu is a respiratory disease and not a stomach or intestinal disease.



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